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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

EUR/CACEN (MUDGE), INR/REA (SFEINBERG)

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SUBJECT: ELECTION UPDATE: CAMPAIGNING IN SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN

1. (U) During a November 8-10 visit to Shymkent, the capital of the Southern Kazakhstan Oblast, poloff examined the campaign climate of this border region. Conversations with NGO and media representatives indicated that the political scene was similar to that throughout Kazakhstan.

#### Campaign Material

2. (SBU) The city has numerous billboards designated for campaign posters of the presidential candidates. Many of these billboards had at least the three major candidates (Nazarbayev, Tuyakbay, and Baymenov) represented and a significant number had posters from all five candidates. Opposition newspapers were readily available at many of the news stands poloff he passed. Some government-owned buildings -- such as libraries -- had campaign posters for Nazarbayev on the front doors, a clear violation of Kazakhstani election law.

#### Independent Media

3. (SBU) Independent media is often subject to government harassment, but continue to publish. The editor-in-chief of the independent Kazakh-language Aigak newspaper told poloff that he has been able to print material on each of the candidates without much pressure from local authorities. He suggested, however, that because he owns his office building and his own printing press, the local authorities have fewer levers of influence over him than over other publishers. He indicated that many of the other independent newspaper outlets in the oblast that rely on printing presses owned by the government or individuals supportive of the government have a much harder time printing campaign material of the opposition candidates.

#### NGO Sector

4. (SBU) Contacts within the NGO community reported that the sector is growing due to the support of international organizations, the USG and other governments. Some organizations reported harassment by local authorities, while others report a positive working relationship with the government. Unsurprisingly, those working on issues of greatest importance to the GOK, such as religious tolerance, reported the fewest problems.

#### The View from the Street

5. (SBU) Most of the people poloff spoke with on the street, regardless of their political affiliation, stated that they believed President Nazarbayev will easily win the election. In addition, many expressed pride that opposition candidate Tuyakbay is from their oblast.

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